Andover Newton

Bulletin

FEBRUARY, 1953

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Heart of Time 3

Dr. Roger Hazelton
Abbot Professor of Christian Theology

The Christmas Story and The Christian Ministry . . 16

Dr. Charles W. Gilkey
Lecturer on Homiletics

The Recovery of Christian Truth 19

Samuel H. Miller
Minister of Old Cambridge Baptist Church
and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy and Religion

Suffering with Christ 29

Théo Preiss
Translated by Dr. Hazelton

A Theology for Christian Social Responsibility . . 33

Dr. Prentiss L. Pemberton
Associate Professor of Christian Sociology

Announcement of Library List 44

The Heart of Time

By Dr. Roger Hazelton
Abbot Professor of Christian Theology

The second of the Alden-Tuthill Lectures
at Chicago Theological Seminary in February, 1953

I

There is a heroine in one of Gabriel Marcel's plays, a witty and attractive woman named Christiane, who is much admired as a hostess and greatly valued as a friend. Her life is obviously busy and apparently successful; but just beneath the surface there is a suspicion — yes, an anguished emptiness — that breaks through at least once into speech. She says, musingly but with increasing fervor:

> Don't you feel sometimes that we are living . . . if you can call it living . . . in a broken world? Yes, broken like a broken watch. The mainspring has stopped working. Just to look at it, nothing has changed. Everything is in place. But put the watch to your ear, and you don't hear any ticking. You know what I'm talking about, the world, what we call the world, the world of human creatures . . . It seems to me that it must have had a heart once, but today you would say the heart has stopped beating.

For how many multitudes of people now alive, do you suppose, does Christiane speak? True, she is only a creature of the playwright's imagination, yet she is far more a symbol than a fiction. Her words, almost casual but deeply probing, lay bare a misgiving which is shared, I believe, by countless folk whose habitual mode of life can scarcely be called living. Their world, if not already and unbearably broken, is at any rate decidedly questionable.

We do not often put our deepest questions into words so aptly or frankly as this, for they lie too far down to be expressed fully and are perhaps too embarrassing to be confessed openly. Usually we translate them into a superficial language that can be more glibly spoken, so that all that remains of the original question is a querulous punctuation or a sighing inflection.

One of these questions that are constantly raised but seldom asked is suggested by Christiane's own way of speaking. It has to do with the coercive, ubiquitous but very elusive character of time itself. What is the meaning, really, of this peculiar constant running through all the variables of our existence? Time is not itself a fact that can be isolated and observed; it rather seems to be a kind of dimension or direction, possibly both, within which every sort of fact is met and measured. Time is certainly baffling, for it wears as many faces as the watches and clocks hung up in an old-fashioned jewelry store. It may creep at a petty pace from day to day or gallop breathlessly by like one of the four horsemen in the Apocalypse. There are moments we think will never end, and whole years that go by without seeming to leave a single trace. When I have a deadline to meet I fear time as if it were a tyrant and a slave-driver, but in moods of calm reflection I bless time as the healer of my resentments and disappointments. Yes, the oddly shifting tempo of time, its almost contradictory variety, is surely among the profoundest riddles of our human pilgrimage.

But have I begged the whole question by calling human life in time a pilgrimage, That is actually the point of Christiane's suspicion: can it be said with truth to be anything of the kind? If time is so amorphous, all-including, and equivocal, must not our human destiny be likewise unstable and ambiguous? A pilgrim is on his way somewhere and knows with some assurance the direction of his going. Can the same be said, and believed, of men and women in so far as they are creatures of time? That is, are we pilgrims headed somewhere and knowing it, or only wanderers getting lost in time, making ignorant circles in the woods of time?

Creatures of time we most indubitably are, but what is the character of that which fashions us? One answer is that time means change, is actually identical with change. "There are no things that change," wrote Henri Bergson in one of the most pregnant, influential sentences in modern philosophy, "there is only change" — and he had time emphatically in mind. When St. Augustine said, "Time takes no holiday," he gave expression to a very similar thought. There are times, all sorts and shapes and sizes, but there is also Time. Because of our involvement in it life seems "but a sleep and a forgetting," in which we are "carried away as with a flood" and "spend our years as a tale that is told."

I have quoted these phrases from the ninetieth psalm in order to remind you that our Christian faith has a very intimate acquaintance with the changeful temporality of earthly existence. The Bible knows as well as modern thought that time conditions in its passing all we men and women have, attempt or are. As we try to picture it to ourselves we use an image like the river — ceaselessly flowing on, taking everything with it, never at rest:

> Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
> Bears all its sons away;
> Thy fly, forgotten, as a dream
> Dies at the opening day.

May not our whole life, then, be "only a dream a little less inconstant" than our dreams themselves? For to exist at all is to be always passing out of one moment into the next, without knowing even when one moment becomes the next; it means to be continually, mortally, in transit — boats adrift with no sure anchorage in fixed being, birds of passage with no safe nest in what is permanenty real.

The Christian form of this protest is the prayer: "Establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands, establish Thou it." In the perspective of our faith, God maintains toward time a positive and providential relationship, so that He is able to keep us from being overwhelmed by mere transiency and passage. But what right and reason do we have for believing this? Is it possible to justify the conviction that time, in spite of the misgivings of Marcel's heroine, has something like a heart, after all?

II

The answer to these questions lies in a more fundamental and realistic understanding of what may be called human or historical time. It is difficult, I know, to hold our thinking about time at this level; it is always more convenient to turn time into an analytical abstraction which can be defined and intellectually managed. Yet this is the one thing we must not do if we are going to find an answer to our question. That answer must be found at the same level where time becomes a problem to us, otherwise the problem remains insistent and insoluble. The human reality of time means the temporal context of our fears and hopes, failures and successes, hates and loves; it means the unobtrusive yet insistent structuring by

time of every nook and cranny of experience. Nothing human is foreign to time, yet time is not automatically or universally friendly to man. It might appear to be the most ordinary and obvious accompaniment to life, but in reality it is both furtive and fugitive so far as any certain knowledge of it goes. Is this because time is so much a part of us, or because we are so much a part of time?

So it becomes easy for us to think of time-in-general as something that wears the tragic mask of death, carrying us downstream to decay and final nothingness. Yet we find it very difficult to live as if this thought were true. Do not all of us need to believe that our work, if not our life, will "tower o'er the wrecks of time"? Whether we are raising children or "running churches" we want what we do to last and count for something in the end, to be established and in an ultimate sense secure. Time and time again we make this living protest against time, not only when some mainspring in us has stopped working but as every day ticks on and on toward night.

I am in time. My past is largely reverie, my future mostly riddle. Although I may turn my clock backward or forward time rolls on with a majestic indifference to my convenience and comfort. It moves irresistibly in one direction, from yesterday and toward tomorrow through today. As time prods my efforts it threatens my achievements. I am pushed incessantly toward its moving edge, forced to live in the present when I would prefer to linger in the past or leap headlong into the future. That is the very nature of time-in-general which, in this first movement of my thought, I tend to identify with time itself. I am being remade by time, over and over again. Small wonder, then, that I should see myself as merely one thing among others hurried, driven along by time — externalized, anonymous, kept in step, part and parcel of the environing, conditioning whole.

But wait — the second movement of my thought begins — time is also in me. That is, it forms the way I not only think about my world but exert my strength upon it and wrest my values from it. By means of time I am able to plan my campaigns, husband my resources, gather in my harvests. But is this not to say that while there is always time-in-general, omnipresent and irrevocable, there is also time-in-particular: a time mourn and a time to dance, a time to get and a time to

lose, a time of war and a time of peace? I surely am not asked by time to manage all of life at once. If there is a time for everything under the sun then I can take my time — living and working in the present without enduring the dictatorship of my guilty yesterdays and my anxious tomorrows. And as I go on thinking in this way about time, I seem to be continually remaking it; the accent of my thought is upon free, creative self-determination, upon all that is inherently and uniquely my own.

This, or something like it, is the human reality of time — a curious blending of manageability and menace, of winning and losing, conquest and surrender. In the one case I seem to be the serf of time, which looms before me as considerably more real than human. In the other, time appears to be on the whole quite serviceable to me, so that it looks almost more human than real. Time-in-general would be what Whitehead called "perpetual perishing" or Bergson "real duration"; time-in-particular would become what Kierkegaard called the "Moment," now re-christened by Heidegger as "the authentic."

Is this just a **mélange** of antithetical assertions that cancel out each other? Are we to conclude that time is indeed so baffling that its meaning can only be stated in the deliberate language of logical contradiction? I have no wish to deny that any serious and adequate statement about time must have a paradoxical edge to it, for I do not believe that so great a mystery can be forced into any logical or linguistic strait-jacket. Yet plainly these alternative ways of regarding time both imply and require each other. I am able to seize time by the forelock, as it were, making every minute count, only because its current is sweeping me irresistibly forward. The possibility of choosing and acting in any given moment is firmly grounded in the necessity of living from what is no longer toward what is not yet. Time endured is the condition of time enjoyed. The urgency and worth of today arises in the fact that yesterday has gone and tomorrow may be too late:

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.

Yet this is not the whole of the matter; any account of time must also fairly include its latent character of pliability by which it becomes amenable to us. We are not simply thrown into this odd, losing race with time, but can adapt it like a raw material to our purposes. Why? Because this perpetual perish-

ing is also a continual renewing. Every now is really new; this quality belongs to time-in-particular only in so far as it is granted by time-in-general; likewise it is time's way of pushing me ahead of myself that makes possible my creative use of time.

In attempting to hold these aspects integrally together, we must avoid both over-subtle and over-simple notions of time. We shall need to keep attention resolutely focused on the human reality for which the word "time" stands. One error is the view of time as progress which has already been pretty well discredited because it had no room for an understanding of the tragic intuition that links time with disintegration and frustration. There is a second view of time which seems to me mistaken, the identification of time with process, and I must confess the difficulties I have in accepting it.

Most forms of modern naturalism started out with the praiseworthy aim of taking time seriously. But very soon they de-humanized time by reducing it to process. I have spent a good many years trying to understand exactly what process means in naturalism, without much success, but I am sure that it is offered as a fundamental category of explanation which is said to go deeper into what is real than time does. Not infrequently, naturalists speak of the "time-process," which suggests that time is one kind of process among others. But more and more in recent naturalism time is seldom mentioned at all, and this I darkly suspect is because its proponents believe they have a better word for time than time itself. I cannot agree, even when process is filled out with other warmer terms such as creativity, novelty or growth. It seems to me that here time — the humanly real time of which I have been speaking — has gotten somehow lost in the shuffle so that what is left is a strange pan-temporalism from which time itself has been excluded. I would even say that naturalism in many cases drains the human content out of time and then diffuses it throughout the uiverse in an acutely unrecognizable form.

But surely time, as D. C. Macintosh used to say, is what it is "experienced as"; and this must mean that we have to trust our intuitions about time, which yield the quite unavoidable impression not of mere ongoingness but of before-and-afterness, of something that succeeds itself by superseding itself. Time is not reducible to temporalism because temporalism

does not take time seriously enough. There is an obvious kinship between time and process, but it is not that which a partial aspect bears to an ultimate principle. I should prefer to say that process is less ultimate than time, whether the term is used on the technical or the natural level. Time, in other words, is more mysterious than process, therefore not equatable with process and not even explainable at its own face value.

How true this is will become clearer as we concentrate upon the meaning of the present, which is central for the understanding of time. There is a Christian meaning, arising in the conviction that in the present man's time opens out upon and receives the seal of God's time. This, again, has something to do with the doctrine of providence.

III

Recently an important book by John Marsh has appeared, titled **The Fulness of Time,** which marks a decided advance in contemporary Christian discussion. Professor Marsh is not only a Biblical theologian singling out the main themes and key-words of Scripture for the purpose of presenting a unified but narrowed intellectual perspective; he is in the best sense a Biblical philosopher, who builds upon the Biblical foundation a responsible and far-ranging view of time and human destiny.

"It is typical of Scripture," writes John Marsh, "not to locate an event by defining its place on a chronological scale, but to identify its content" (pages 20-21). A time is known by what takes place in it rather than by its position in a metrical sequence. The Bible is not unacquainted with time as passage or transition — a quick look at almost any psalm or prophet will correct that mistake — but its emphasis is unerringly upon time in what Marsh calls the "realistic" or humanly lived sense — time as affording an opportunity to which men are to respond with an appropriate action. So there are times of natural events, social occasions or religious services, and when any of these times have come, men are to seize their opportuinty by some active and suitable response.

This sort of thing has been said often enough before by men like Pedersen, Cullmann, Brunner and others, but Marsh employs the Biblical understanding of time not to separate and purify the Christian faith so much as to relate it to the

broader human problems of time, history, and eternity. Thus he discovers in the various Biblical words for time some living, valid convictions about God at work in nature and history; indeed, this view of time makes rather doubtful any neat distinction between natural and historical happening. For Biblically grounded faith, nature and history alike make up the temporal context of our existence, so that in it the opportunities that come to man, come from God. "Even in a simple thing like going to bed at night, or rising at the beginning of the day; in sheltering from the rain, or gathering the harvest of the fields, man is really making response to the activity of God in time" (Marsh. op. cit., page 22). This begins to sound very much like providence, and represents what Marsh calls "the theological transcendence of the chronological."

Thus the Biblical and Christian view includes both time as measured passage, or **chronos**, and time as meaningful opportunity, or **kairos**, but the typical accent is upon **kairos** as the fulfilling of **chronos**. All of us must face the sobering fact that we live from that which is no more toward that which is not yet, through this slender, fragile boundary-line called "Now." But this does not mean that there is no permanence, no purchase on the real, in every passing moment. That moment at which I am now speaking — I mean the moment before it has become past and after it is merely future — is a point in time, but it is also a viewpoint, a standpoint, a point of departure. That is its authentic and original character, which cannot be annulled or overridden by the ceaseless flux. The present, then, is more than a ripple in the rushing stream of time; it is a sort of rudder by which time becomes maneuverable, under God, to human freedom. And since each present is forever merging into the next, and that into still another, there are second chances, fresh beginnings, all along the way.

Is this not suggested by those words we read later in the ninetieth psalm: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"? The rule here seems to be: one thing at a time, no use crying over spilled milk, let the morrow take care of itself. Time then is not all drift and waste. Our span of life, however frail or brief, is broken down into livable and workable units — years, months, weeks, days, hours, and minutes — each of which means that the field of effort is always here and the instant for choice is forever now.

The crux of any understanding of time lies in its handling of the present; this is the "time being" which binds all other

times together and should therefore be the clue to their interpretation. If we could once grasp the true meaning of the little word "Now" we should know everything we need to know, if not all we should like to know, about the nature of time. The Christian faith is particularly rich and relevant in precisely this respect. For faith, each moment is a providential present, to be lived and known in its relationship to God as well as in its bearing on the past and future which it uniquely bridges and subtends.

Why is the present moment providential? Not because it is a suspension of the chronological in which eternity invades time and captures our freedom, turning it into faith. That is the existentialist error, usually expressed by saying that God determines time vertically, not horizontally. We do the present no real honor and we make impossible a genuine understanding of it by this collapsing of time into an artificial capsule of timelessness. The present is providential just because it is **presented to us,** horizontally and vertically at once, as a creative opportunity. **Kairos** neither defies **chronos** nor merely duplicates it, but enables us to align ourselves and lay our temporal course with God, who bends down into time but is not bound by time.

Obviously the present is not all the time there is, but it is the only time that really counts, for it consists of my response to opportunity by which my entire heritage is revalued and my whole destiny is prefigured. We often tend to think, quite crudely, of the past as merely an accumulated scrap-heap of dead, burned-out presents. That is not only a complete falsification of the motive-power of memory; it neglects the fact that the past is also the realm of discarded possibilities and missed opportunities. Even more, it does a great deal less than justice to the fact that often we do not recognize the hand of providence at the moment when it really enters time, but only afterward as we look back upon it. And sometimes, too, we speak rather carelessly of the future as an "open book" whose pages still are blank. This quite demolishes the real character of hope, which envisages the future as the realm of beckoning actualities, suggested by Hocking's unforgettable phrase, "anticipated attainment."

There is a real distinction to be made between the past and the future, but not a simple metaphysical contrast between what has happened and what is going to happen, in the terms

of actuality and possibility. There is as much possibility in the past as there is actuality in the future; and the key for understanding both is that of opportunity-and-response which is the providential content of every present. We do not thereby rid ourselves of before-and-afterness, or **chronos,** but we see that it is **kairos** which determines the eventfulness of **chronos,** fore and aft. If we follow Paul Minear in speaking of past and future as two modes or movements within time, as **passingness** and **comingness,** and we do so from the perspective of the providential present, God's ordering of time by which He gives us a "Now" on which to stand. The present, as we Christians know and live it, is as far as can be imagined from the "specious present" or "tenth-of-a-second" so worked over by modern philosophy and psychology. It means that God Himself is engaged in our existence. Martin Buber puts it well: "The present is not fugitive and transient, but continually present and enduring . . . The present arises only in virtue of the fact that the Thou (God) becomes present" (**I and Thou,** pages 13, 12). Even as we are creatures of time, so time is the creature of God.

IV

One meaning of God's providence is that He wills and works to keep His world in being, at the same key or pitch of purpose for which He created it. Providence therefore means God's preservation of the world, and this bears directly upon our Christian understanding of time. The very notion of such a divine enterprise involves the belief that time is real for God as well as for ourselves. We cannot mention preservation without implying, first, that God employs time as His instrument and second, that in some sense He is constrained to do so. From the fact that time is time and God is God it does not follow that "never the twain shall meet." Rather we must say: If God does not reveal His will in time and for time, He is no God, and if time cannot be transcendently used, it is clearly not the **kairos** of which we have been thinking.

The world of created things and goods is not self-producing and self-justifying; yet neither does it simply "refer back" to its Creator. That is because the world does not come ready-made from God like furniture or automobiles from the factory; it is always in the making, always being made, always becoming what it really is and being what it is intended to become. Therefore time is of the very essence of creation — the word

itself contains a fortunate ambiguity, as it means both creative activity and created product, neither of which must be allowed to cancel out the other. Time represents not only God's way of acting on the world but also His way of reacting to the world.

Shall we say then that providence, expressed in my continuance in being, in God's preservation of my life, is sheer successive re-creation? Must we conceive providence in terms of independent instants, each one of which God has to create all over again? No; it is not because God adds one more moment to my existence that my existence is prolonged by that one moment. It is because all moments are cherished and conserved by the same God whose mighty act launches them in being, according to what Professor Tillich calls His "sustaining creativity." My preservation is due to God's own concern for my existence, expressed in His continuing solicitude for all creation. Every moment is endowed by God with the impress of His Lordship over time, which means that His sustaining and guiding grace is structured into the very flow and fibre of time as its momentum or motive power.

I believe that this relationship of man the creature to God the Creator **via** time was better understood by medieval than by modern thinkers, for all our fascinated preoccupation with the mystery of time. Men like Bonaventura and Albert the Great held the view that every creature, on one side of itself, tended downward toward destruction, while on the other it strove to keep on being what God intended. They spoke of a bent toward nothingness, a kind of subterranean death-wish, which was compensated by an opposite tendency toward the first cause, God. This second pole, then, is our appropriate response, our providential **élan vital** or aptitude, toward that opportunity which God forever offers us. It is our way of moving through time with courageous faith. Situated as we are somewhere "east of Eden," it is our memory of primal harmony which puts the engines of existence in reverse. As Robert Frost has noted in one of his profoundest poems called "West-Running Brook," it is "not just a swerving, but a throwing back, as if regret were in it and were sacred." The poem goes on:

> Our life runs down in sending up the clock.
> The brook runs down in sending up our life.
> The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
> And there is something sending up the sun.

It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
The tribute of the current to the source.
It is from this in nature we are from.
It is most us.

If that is our relationship to God by means of time, what is God's relationship to us? Here we have to keep our thinking straight by insisting that while time is clearly real for God, it is nevertheless real in a somewhat different way from that in which it is real to us. Our time, woven of passage and opportunity, is what we call history. God's time is what we know as eternity. Plainly, the two are not the same.

What is the intuition that provokes and nourishes our Christian faith in an eternal God? Not that set up by philosophical reflection on the difference between change and the changeless or the timely and the timeless. We must not revert to the old and wooden view that eternity means perfect but static immobility, as this would make a genuine providence unthinkable. But neither should we try to conceive eternity as "unending time," as Cullmann and Ferré are urging. No accumulation or prolongation of time can achieve the redemptive transformation which is the signal token of God's work in time; and furthermore, the very notion of unending time breaks down under its own weight.

The true and Christian meaning of eternity emerges as we reflect upon the contrast which is felt and lived between the passing and coming of our time and the abiding character of God's time. To faith the meaning of eternity is not timelessness or timeliness, but timefulness. Its best synonym is simply everlastingness. The psalm which has been serving us as a kind of text makes this abundantly clear:

Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all
generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.

Our time is from and to God's time. It is eternity that makes our history truly historic, because God conditions and conserves and completes our history. He is our dwelling place in all generations because in Him our comings and goings, our downsittings and uprisings, are taken up and transfigured.

So, whether we are beset by the monotonous tick of time or gratefully aware of the nick of time, we know that we can trust in God's everlasting presence given in the midst of time. All our tomorrows to the end of time, He has made to be in this His day; and all our yesterdays from the beginning of time, He has also made to be in this His day (Augustine, **Confessions,** 1, 6). Our time, then, is really God's time after all. Called into being by His creating power, kept in motion by His patient providence, it is being fulfilled according to His redeeming promise. That is the heart of time. It has not stopped beating, and will not, even when God calls it a day. Through faith in Him who abides, yesterday, today, and forever, we may hear it still.

The Christmas Story and The Christian Ministry

By Dr. Charles W. Gilkey
Lecturer on Homiletics

One of our Cape Cod neighbors dropped in the other day with one of the best Cape stories I have picked up in many a day; and one that is highly relevant to our own life and work here on this Hill. A visiting fisherman wanted to try his luck at bottom-fishing in Vineyard Sound, and consulted an old salt for the ranges that would anchor him on the best fishing grounds. "Sail straight for Monomoy Light until you get the Congo spire and the Baptist spire right in line with each other, and there you are." Then came this priceless comment: "First time I ever knew them two churches to line up together to any good purpose!"

Well, if that old salt could only visit us here on this Hill, he would see those same two groups of churches lined up here together to train fishers of men.

Now this is our last daily Chapel in the Advent season, and on Sunday most of us will be either hearing or preaching about the bearing of the Christmas good news on our anxious and war-shadowed time. Suppose we concentrate this morning on the relevance of the Christmas story to the work of the Christian ministry.

One of the plainest points in the Christmas story is the obvious fact that Jesus from the very day of his birth came into a preoccupied world that had little room and less attention for what he said and what he brought to mankind. Our very familiar Christmas text tells the story of his whole life and of his tragic death in one deeply symbolic sentence:

"THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN."

So what did he do from the day of his birth to the day of his death? He took what men left him, humbly and gratefully and with faith in God: that manger in a Bethlehem stable, those doors in Galilee shut one by one in his face, that cross and that rocky grave outside Jerusalem. Accepting every one of them, he transfigured and transformed them by his own

presence and spirit and trust in God . . . until now every one of them is radiant. For evidence at Christmas time look at every crêche or pageant or Christmas card, or listen to any Christmas carol. There is His manger — aglow. From the Christmas of his birth to the Easter of his resurrection, "The Light . . . hath shined for us."

Now time and again the parish minister repeats some such experience in some small way. In my own student days, thinking about the ministry, I read W. Dean Howell's letters home from a college student: the man of affairs plays the game . . . the lawyer . . . the doctor . . . "while the minister sits in the stand and explains the game to the ladies" In the self-confident and self-sufficient masculinity of the early 20's, that hit me hard . . . and stayed with me a long time . . . The parish minister does seem often to be spending most of his time and energy with women and children, while the men of affairs are very busy otherwhere. But by the time I had lived and worked a decade or two in the same community; had watched those children growing up into posts of trust and influence; had realized that in their lives, as in my own, the creative and quickening influences had been those of mother and sister and wife: I had begun to see things in a longer perspective and a very different light . . . You can see that light inside the bright windows of any home these shortest days of the year. Our own hearts tell us today that this is throughout our western world today the festival of the **home** and the **family**. Far beyond what we call "church circles" he who loved children, and made men realize that they belong to the family of God, has shed abroad his own transfiguring radiance . . . and the minister and the church who still have access of their own to home and hearthfires, do not lack for spheres of influence.

Or again . . . in the second paragraph of the foreword to F. L. Allen's recent book **The Big Chance,** summarizing some changes in American life these last 50 years, comes this arresting phrase: "The long decline in the prestige of organized religion." Any parish minister, not least in New England, is likely to discover the element of truth in that phrase . . . and in what Dr. Fosdick said to me about the lessened influence of preaching. But then perhaps the Good Lord sends him . . . as I went this summer, to supply one Sunday in a parish in Maine where a graduate of Andover Newton had

spent the last 14 years of his ministry before his sudden death . . . No doubt people had told him that there was no time or no energy left there for the work of the church. But when he was suddenly gone, the **whole community** felt and lamented the spiritual vacuum that was left. The Jesus who drew shepherds and fisherfolk into his company and transformed them there into men who "turned the world upside down," has before our eyes moved out beyond "church circles," and made the day of his birth not simply an ecclesiastical but a community and a human festival, wherein for a few days at least we all discover that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Look at the lights aglow in any downtown center, and listen to the carols abroad upon the listening air. God give us ministers grace to follow in His transforming train!

And finally: across the Blessing of Simeon in the temple long ago, as across so many of the carols to this day, there falls already the dark shadow of a cross ahead. Any faithful parish minister spends much of his time and more of his strength, in that shadow: in the homes and hearts of his people; it may even be in his own. He may even discover, as some ministers do to this day, that it is not only in Jeremiah that prophets are killed and stoned — it happens to ministers at the hands of churches to this day. No one of us knows today what crosses we too may have to take up and bear in the unknown days ahead. But this Christmas story, no less than these carols, were all written in the light that streams from the cross of him who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many . . ." Let us pray:

"O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord, Immanuel."

The Recovery of Christian Truth

By Samuel H. Miller

Minister of Old Cambridge Baptist Church
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**One of a series of three lectures given at
Union Theological Seminary in October, 1952**

In Osbert Sitwell's fascinating memoirs, "Laughter in the Next Room," the concluding section deals with what he calls the "difficulty of knowing the end of the world when you reach it." He says "there are no signposts to tell you where you are. The sky is still there, the light shines down, from heights canopied or azure. In the shapes of the clouds, in their groupings and shiftings, you can still read visions of fortune as easily as of disaster . . . You eat and sleep." Everything in short goes on pretty much as it always went on. It is difficult, regardless of the number of unwelcome prophets who tell us that the end of a world has come, for us to really believe it. It is always easier, and for some reason it seems kinder and perhaps healthier, to disregard its presence. As Jakob Burckhardt once remarked, one can look too long into the abyss. And of coure, there are always convenient factors, which if thrown into the scales violently enough by a passionate or wistful onlooker, will counter momentarily the darkness and chaos, and give a glimpse of all things held in perfect balance.

Whether this is the end of a world or not, men will debate for a long time, perhaps even after a new one has been established. Yet one thing is obvious regardless of the terms used to describe it. A vast and thorough-going change has come over the life of man. What once held his world together, gave it shape and meaning, somehow abrupting lost its cohesive power, and the world literally fell apart, while strange new forces unexpectedly erupted and barbarously took over control, astonishing, humiliating, bewildering all of us.

In the realm of religion, the change manifested itself subtly but with increasing insistence. Whereas two centuries ago, a few scientists shocked the multitudes by asserting that God was an unnecessary hypothesis for the explanation of the universe, now the multitudes feel that religion itself is quite unnecessary for the living of a good life. Not that they have

anything against religion, unless they feel they have outgrown it, but they honestly know of no way to use it or make anything of it. Men still tip theirs hats most courteously in its direction, but their lives are no longer motivated or sustained by it. Our resultant predicament is whether such a religion as ours, grown old in history and for an increasing number of people somewhat obsolete, can be reborn with such essential vitality that it can pull the world together and make life meaningful for those who stand at the end of an age, before the abyss, insecure and unsheltered.

The Loss of the Christian Structure of Truth

One of the most obvious factors in our situation is the fading out of the great structrue of Christian truth from the imagination of men. That magnificent fabric, fashioned in concrete terms, which interpreted the ultimate nature of reality and elucidated the mystery and meaning of history, has slowly but surely vanished from the practical concerns of the modern man, and all too often from the preaching of the church. Beginning with the Creation and the Fall of Man, ascending through the Prophets and the Psalmists, and reaching its climax in the revelation of Christ the Lord, with the Last Judgment as the final act, it supplied man with a vast and profoundly intimate formulary by which all the common events of the world and of his own life could be interpreted, judged and held in meaningful unity. With the coming of the modern era, signalized by such names as Newton, LaPlace, Darwin, Marx, man's gaze was turned away from that sacred panorama until it lost its focussed sharpness and became a dim blur on the distant horizon of the primitive world. Sections of the structure came under the direct attack of evolution, natural law, and historical criticism. What was not demolished by argument, slowly fell to pieces through the neglectful atrition of a world interested in other things. The ruins of that once majestic structure still stand just beyond the edge of our busy lives, but to most moderns they seem no longer habitable.

Milton was probably the last great writer of genius to utilize the Christian myth with appropriate strength and grandeur. But it is highly significant that his works, while much honored, are no longer read except in courses on English Literature. Their structure of dramatic action, the pattern of motivation and moral reaction, belonging to a Christian era,

render them somewhat opaque to our modern minds. His was the last glory of the setting sun before the coming of a long night. The breakup began and flared to a bitter anguish in Thomson's "City of Dreadful Night," while the ruins of Tinturn Abbey stand like a symbol of the lonely, listening soul of Wordsworth, who heard in solitude only the sad voice of humanity, bereft of those living metaphors and might signs out of which both faith and poetry are made.

In truth the old had not fallen away so much as it had been pushed out by the new. Sir Isaac Newton's myth of a universe so tightly contingent that no light of another world could shine through it had moved into the center of man's attention. Cause and effect now began to have a kind of numinous attraction for the human mind, and everything was laid under this new dispensation. Nothing was denied in sacrifice to the new god, and the old god was suddenly and literally out of a job. He no longer fitted into the framework of absolute contingency, self-operating and self-explanatory, which purported to represent the whole truth of reality. For a long time the Christian tradition would be respected, but within smaller and smaller perspectives. Its grand structure would remain, but its power would dwindle. Having fallen from theology to ethics, it would at last justify itself on practical grounds. Men would defend it, sometimes in extremely unfortunate ways, but like the gods of classic Greece, it was on the way out, to be treated with declining respect, made the butt of easy humor, and to have less and less to do fundamentally with the morality of even those who maintained it in their sacred liturgies.

As Friedrich Nietzsche saw so plainly, once the Christian cosmology was given up, the Christian ethic would follow soon after. As Lewis Mumford rudely puts it the seven deadly sins became the virtues of the new age. Nothing indicates the loss of the Christian ethic so markedly as the thorough obfuscation of the Beatitudes in the life of the church. They are simply not understandable in the light of our present moral relationships, our operating cultural mores. We found them no longer usable once the new modus vivendi of science and industry took us over. They either became visionary ideals impossible of practise in the practical world, or else interim ethics historically limited to the age in which they were promalgated. Once they were thoroughly routed from the practical conscience, the mercantile virtues of aggressiveness

and prestige, engendered in the Renaissance, unleashed by the Industrial Revolution, and nurtured by the bourgoisie, took their place, clothed themselves in the Christian gospel, and even reinterpreted Christ Himself to justify their claims to righteousness.

In short, both in the realms of ultimate interpretation and of practical interpretation, in myth and ethic, great changes have come to pass in which the world cannot be said to be the same. It would seem as if it is not total exaggeration to say that a world had come to an end. Certainly there are many who are not conscious of it, having enclosed that older world within an impervious shell of memory and hope, where they will continue to exist as long as they live. But for those of us who dwell in the world, and bear its anguish on our hearts, sharing its shame and sin, there will be no surcease from labor, until we have rebuilt the temple and sing the Lord's song again in Zion. Until then, man will be essentially homeless.

New Substance for Old Symbols

Two rather superficial antidotes offer themselves as solutions of the present crisis of what Paul Tillich has called the "strengthless symbol." One is to bring up the whole armory of ancient symbolism and creed, and re-establish it lock, stock, and barrel, with dogmatic declarations of unchanging truth. The other is to plunge boldly into the well-intentioned labor of creating new symbols for a new day. Each has its appeal and has already eventuated in definite partisans within Christendom. At their opposite extremes, the ultra-conservative, and the ultra-progressive seek to accomplish a new unitive power for the chaotic world. Actually however, both are futile. The imposition of a lost symbolism on the wild energies of the current scene is most questionable. We have been separated from these symbols, and they from us, by a great historical storm. To transplant them will be to discover how deep in darkness the old roots descend and how impossible it is to find new soil of the right sort and of such depth to hold them sustainingly. The whole attempt reminds one too much of Søren Kierkegaard's metaphor of schoolboys who "snitch" the answers out of the back of their books without working the problems.

As for the second solution, the attempt to make new symbols I fear mistakes the character of symbols themselves. They are never deliberately fabricated or manufactured. They are created by a vast complex of historical and human forces, the depth of which is unfathomed by the conscious carpentry of hopeful and ingenious individuals. They share in the mystery of being, transcending the dimensions of our conscious thought. The great religious symbols are not within our power to make; we may deny them or affirm them, but that is all.

There is a way open, however, for the solution of this religious crisis. It is in the direction of what I would call **resubstantiation.** This is neither the restoration of an antique nor the synthetic concoction of the moment. It is the effort to identify in the mystery of life the very substance out of which the symbol once was fashioned. It turns back to reality for that meaning out of which the symbol grew. It is grounded in the conviction that the ancient formulary of the Christian myth was in no wise accidental or arbitrary, but an adequate statement of the profoundest revelation of the nature of ultimate reality. The path back to it does not lead through history, or through literature, but through mystery into being, through experience into life. Our basic need is to put substance, our substance into the symbol. We will find that this human reality is more accurately and adequately interpreted by the Christian myth than by the presently popular scientific myth.

The reason I prefer to use the term "resubstantiation" will be made apparent if it is compared to William Ernest Hocking's term "reconception" which is commended to us in his "Living Religions and A World Faith." "Reconception" looks perilously like an intellectual reinterpretation. As far as such a venture may assist in the resurrection of Christian truth, it seems to me to share in the objectionable character of all intellectual attempts to rebuild the faith. It eventuates in a set of terms conceived objectively, and does not necessitate the deeper recovery of immediacy in terms of life. It is this substantial element, this solid stuff of human existence, which must be reintroduced into the equation before the symbols and the myths will regain their relevance.

> "For the new locus is never
> Hidden inside the old one

Where Reason could rout it out,
Nor guarded by dragons in distant
Mountains where Imagination
Could explore it; the place of birth
Is too obvious and near to notice,
Some dull dogpatch a stone's throw
Outside the walls, reserved
For the eyes of faith to find." *

Now the work of resubstantiation, being neither the mere restoration of the old without regard for the contemporary situation nor the making of new symbols out of the whole cloth of the present, requires a discipline which in itself is religious. It does not repudiate the old nor does it ignore the new. In fact it believes the only way to resubstantiate the traditional terms and symbols is to relate the old and the new at a level of life where they will coalesce. Not until we begin to live on the same level of existence as that from which the insights and experiences engendered the symbols, will we ever devise their content and substantial meaning. This is our first and most rigorous requirement.

Recovery of Our Total Being

What this means is that the loss of religious symbols was never merely the loss of certain paraphernalia. It was the loss of certain insights, comprehensions, experiences, ways of thinking and depths of being. The withering of the Word is in fact a reduction of the dimensions of consciousness. Existence is narrowed down, its depth battened over, its height hidden, and its inter-mutuality ignored. **To resubstantiate the symbol means, then,** first of all, **to recover the full dimension of human experience.** It means opening up the abyss and scanning the skies for forgotten stars. It is, of all explorations, the most painful for it can be done nowhere except in the human heart.

It is here and here alone that the meeting place of the old and the very new may be found. Here the ancient terms may validate themselves without suffering violence or distortion, and the absolutely contemporaneous find adequate articulation for expression and communication. One is reminded of the words in Christopher Fry's "A Sleep of Prisoners," "O God, the fabulous wings unused, Folded in the heart." And then the haunting revelation of Peter that the flames he sees sur-

* W. H. Auden — "The Age of Anxiety," p. 135.

rounding them are "all human. There's no fire. Breath and blood chokes and burns us. This surely is unquenchable? It can only transform. There's no way out. We can only stay and alter . . ." Only by staying, long staying, and altering, deep altering, will we become ourselves, and in time know the truth.

One may well call this an age between gods. It is an interim, a day of waiting. To avoid this waiting is to avoid the beginning of that path which might lead us back to a world reinhabited by transcendent meaning and purpose. To ignore it in a fury of desperate action is merely to take a hundred wrong paths and to exhaust our life in wild futilities. We cannot create immediacy. It is a gift, and our only wooing will be a worthy repudiation of substitutes. Our God is a jealous god, and his visit will not be made until we are truly at home.

In such an emergency then, can we take no self-assured action? Is it true that there is nothing to be done? We are living in the dark night of the soul, a veritable eclipse of God. Obviously it is painful. We who are ministers, perhaps most of all, share in this poverty, this spiritual bereavement. The Word of God has worn out, and we are left with nothing but talk. The world has fallen to pieces and faith has no binding power left in it. The eucharist has become a symbol without substance, and the cross an ecclesiastical sign from which the numinous power of the Lord has vanished. There is distance between everything, a wild epidemic distance that filters into every relationship and separates us from everything, even at the most intimate centers of our living. Perhaps this very openness or emptiness or separatedness is the cross we are asked to bear for a divine purpose. If we hold this new distance, this cleansing, antiseptic distance, until our hearts are purged of their superficial identification with the conventionalized images of God and the faith, we may then be made strong in hunger with a holy desire for the Lord whose face is hidden in the mystery of eternal light and a true fear becomes the ground of all our wisdom. This is the hour when in truth we can say that we are poverty stricken — "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This is the hour when we can say that "we hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Respect for the Witnesses

Having thus said that our basic necessity is to wait on the Lord, with all the intensity that such waiting can accumulate

as a work for which there is and can be no substitute, one must go on to say that this waiting is not at all passive. We can "prepare the way of the Lord." Certainly one of the things we can do is **to lay ourselves under the origins.** This is not a retreat to the past. The past has nothing to do with it. Time is not of the essence of God's kingdom or of man's spirit. For too long we have been susceptible to that historical snobbery which thinks that everything which happened before our time was merely to prepare the world for our coming. We would do well to recover some sense of how greatly history fluctuates, and how far man deviates from great norms of reality. Our science and industry, our power and control of energy is indubitable. In its sight the ancients look like pygmies. But in the presence of Moses, or of Jacob who labored on the Godhead, or of Isaiah, of Jesus Christ our Lord, we are miserably undeveloped and malnourished. They might make poor laboratory assistants but God pity us, we make mighty poor prophets or disciples. Our humanity has been reduced to the paper-thin level of scientific precision and superficiality. We need to be awakened at the deeper levels of our being by standing as close as we can to men who lived in the full dimension of their humanity. This is also to wait, to listen to the witness, to be silent until the Word is spoken which binds all men to the Everlasting Communion of an abundant life in God.

Respect for the Truth in Life

There is another way to interpret the work of preparing the way of the Lord. Not only as a great waiting, not only as lying under the origins, but finally, as the **identification of that truth which is implicit in our being.** This is to deepen ourselves down to life, where the mystery of existence is inwardly illumined. It is here that resubstantiation has its truest meaning and lays its heaviest claim upon us. It is the fundamental theological work of the Christian, the basic duty of the minister. Here in the living texture of human experience the bond with the Word was lost, and here it is that it must be found again. Beginning at scratch, in naked, spiritual poverty, we must work with the raw material, and with the sharpest eye of the spirit identify what is happening in us. With our own flesh and blood, by the sin which haunts us, we must find the Garden of Eden, the soaring towers of Babel, the purged tongue of the prophet, the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord. Until we know these things from the

inside, which means knowing them in terms of our own life, we have but the shells of truth and not that truth which was made flesh. Somewhere in the darkness of our comfortable not-at-homeness there resides the permanent structures of that truth which is of the nature of ultimate reality. Deep in ourselves there is water for the empty vessels, true substance for lifeless symbols, and the power of divine mystery for the deepening sanctity of the sacraments, if we can find it.

There is no doubt of it, we are pilgrims again, displaced persons, uprooted, homeless and unsheltered in a storm-driven world. Our inner life has been swept clean, a great desolate waste, without landmarks or paths, haunted by despair and fantastic fears. Our outer world has changed its shape, and is subject to new principalities and powers. If Charles Péguy thought at first he lived in a "period," a time rendered contemptible because it was without religious significance, he died having seen his time rise to its meaning as an "epoch." This is our destiny under God, to work in an **epoch**, by waiting and hunger, by poverty and anguish, by seeking, knocking, asking, until the Word binds us up and heals us, frees us from the bondage of this world's death and lifts us to an eternal life here and now. Until then, there is no place to lay our heads. It is for us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

And yet our pilgrimage will not be cursed with the fear of futility. If we knock, it shall be opened unto us. If our eye is generous, and not squinted by our caution and prejudice, the light will enter us. His Word will not be frustrate; it will accomplish what He hath sent it to do — to cleanse our hearts down to the last painful poverty of despair and to open that door into a grace so inexhaustible that only God in His infinite love could provide it. Grace! Indeed, this is the **Word.** How well does Péguy speak of it when he says that "Grace is insidious, it twists and is full of surprises . . . When it doesn't come from the right it comes from the left. When it doesn't come straight it comes bent, and if it doesn't come bent it comes broken. When it doesn't come from above, it comes from below; and when it doesn't come from the center it comes from the circumference. When it doesn't come like a bubbling spring, it can, if it like, come like a trickle of water oozing from under a Loire dyke." Ah, the walls of the world are thick, and imponderably heavy, but though they be

mountains the great sea of God will seep through and in time remind us of the eternities.

The revelation of God then, for which we wait, out of which the symbol and the myth both rise, always approaches us clothed in mystery, never without the hunger of man and yet always quite unexpectedly. Thus it is that we stand desperate but not without hope. Within our historical memory, the astonishing redemption of a moribund Christianity by the gay troubadour of Assisi or the equally tremendous outburst of new life investing the original truths of the Christian gospel through the stormy vigor of Martin Luther, remind us in magnificent dimensions that a religion grown old can be reborn. Although we too suffer from what Maritain has called the "historical sclerosis of faith" there is no reason to fear that it is final or fatal. With the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins we believe that there is a "dearest freshness deep down things" and that from it there will come a bright evangel to "make all things new."

Suffering With Christ

By Théo Preiss

(Translated by Dr. Roger Hazelton)

Théo Preiss was a young French theologian who died several years ago. This short essay is taken from his book *La Vie en Christ*, and is reprinted by permission of the publishers, Delachaux et Niestlé, Switzerland.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing to those of us who are hospitalized for an indefinite period is not so much the worry of not being cured and so of losing in any case a good part of our youth, but the uselessness of our situation. Here we are, in charge of others or of society, unable to be of service and good for nothing. The suffering of a wounded soldier makes some sense and has an obvious nobility; but what is the sense of that of a bed-ridden person?

To this preoccupation of our being, condemned to living horizontally, the natural man in us can only answer with revolt or resignation. But passive resignation before fatality is far from being a confident faith in the God of life and love. We well know that God chastens those He loves, that the Father of the Crucified One does not spare His own children the burden of a cross in their turn, and that to accept bearing one's cross is the very ABC of anyone who would follow Jesus. We know, too, that sickness is a call to hush the chit-chat of an agitated world in ourselves and to hearken to the voice of God; a school of purification in which all our securities are removed so that we may be taught to rest in God alone; a glowing crucible whose furnace is meant to purify the gold of our faith (I Peter 1:7) and to make us a more docile instrument in God's hand. The Gospel, finally, gives us the radiant assurance that we are not alone in the depth of our loneliness: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And the Risen One adds: "Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

But all this — which is deeply true — only shows us that illness may be a blessing to ourselves. To be sure, we do not neglect the fact that courage, peace or joy on a sick person's part may be a striking testimony to the eyes of his immediate circle. The sick, confined to bed for many long years, have

been in their agony the source of a light that still shines on even after their death. And this shining is but the visible reflection of a more hidden and a greater ministry — of a humble and faithful intercession in which, well beyond their four walls, they bear aloft in prayer their own: friends, country, church, and the vast world.

Our room, our bed can therefore become a sanctuary, the place of a ministry as great as that of the most energetic missionaries. But the Bible tells us of a possibility, yes, of a reality, still more profound. Truly, it has to do with a mystery: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what remains of Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church, of which I became a minister . . ." (Colossians 1:24). The apostle Paul rejoices in being able to suffer for other members of the body of Christ, for the whole Church. Is this to say that Paul wants to be another Christ, whose suffering and death might complete the unfinished work of Jesus? It is here that, because of the Catholic misunderstanding and the cult of the martyrs, we hesitate, we Protestants, to follow through the apostle's thought. Our Catholic brethren like to think, in fact, that they can offer their sufferings in sacrifice to God for whatever person or whatever specific cause and so contribute to the world's salvation. That is also why they frequently believe that by inflicting mortifications, by loving their sufferings, through imitating those of Christ, they can not simply expiate their own sins but still more acquire merits of an additional kind for themselves and others. This motif does not lack a certain human greatness — but it is a greatness altogether human.

In reality, the apostle is not concerned to find in his witness and martyrdom an imitation of Christ's. He protests vehemently: "Was Paul crucified for you?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). He escapes suffering every time he can, without betraying his vocation as a witness. Between the sufferings of Christ and one's own there is no common measure. In his passion the Son of God, become flesh of our flesh, took upon himself our meanness, our sins, our curse, and our death. Only the sufferings of a man of sorrows can save us. And they save us abundantly; nothing is wanting. If the apostle can speak of "what is lacking in the tribulations of Christ" he means by it not the particular and unique sorrows of Christ, but the ensemble of the testimonies of the messianic time, prefigured for His own by the mysterious will of the Father. For it is by

many tribulations that we have to enter into the Reign of God (Acts 14:22). Christ took everything upon himself, all our illnesses, all our troubles. And his triumph is total. Yet he gives us grace to be able to follow him along the witness' path, participating like soldiers in this great warfare where he has already carried off the decisive victory, which however is not yet achieved. Faced by the rear guard actions which the Adversary is still making, there is a mysterious solidarity between the fighters and their victorious captain.

The apostle knows himself to be in **communion** with the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10). Since his baptism when the Lord placed his hands on him and led him toward his destiny, Paul knows himself as dead with Christ in order to be risen again with him. From then on all his living will be at once a death and a new life. The dying of Jesus is at work in his trials so that through them his life abounds in the Church "in such a way that death is at work in us, and life in you." At bottom Christ is in agony until the end of the world in the members of his body (Matthew 25:31-46). And this mystery of participation in the Lord's death is much more profound than an "imitation" of Christ. For the faithful, it is not a matter of putting up one's cross alongside that of Jesus. Rather let us take the symbol of communicating vessels: inevitably, Christ living in the work of his body makes his members live under the sign of the cross and resurrection.

And through this participation in the death and life of Christ, there can and should be exchanges of brotherly service among the different members of the body of the Church. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with him. But inversely, some members are especially called upon to suffer for the rest. It so happens that in the life of our body, such an organ might suffer and even be cut off for the welfare of the whole. Skin must endure the cold in order to protect the interior organs; feet are used to transport the body, Some organs appear passive and useless, but science teaches us that all have their use, apparent or secret. So it is with the body of Christ. Each member has received from God its place, its gift, its special vocation. May not ours be that of waging warface against evil, sin, and death from this bed where God has put us for a time? We are neither apostles nor martyrs. But all of us are called by our sickness to be witnesses, combatants. It is enough simply to accept this place and this particular function, and to believe that as Christ is no stranger to

our life so our life is no stranger to his — that by the secret communion which is established between him and ourselves, our illness and even our death can be turned to God's glory.

All this has nothing to do with that sentimental romanticism in which, by a kind of smiling secrecy, one comes to love his suffering and to find himself interesting. That is one of the worst forms of our egocentric pride. It is not a question of living our misfortunes — some hymns of the last century are a bit ambiguous in this respect — but of loving and serving God and our neighbor throughout our present life. Suffering in itself is a bad thing, an attack of Satan against God's creation. If it were good in itself would Jesus have healed so many sick people and driven out demons? Let us beware of all this sentimentalism like the plague. God calls us to a manly fight against sickness and death. We have not merely the right but the duty to fight and pray with all our being for our health. But at the same time we must — what am I saying? — we have the privilege, by virtue of our Lord's victory, of taking part in the communion of his sufferings, of being thus enrolled in our Church Militant and of being secretly at the service of our own loved ones and of the whole body of Christ. And now, dear friends known and unknown, open your Bibles and read again the apostle Paul, especially the fourth and sixth chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians.

A Theology for Christian Social Responsibility

By Dr. Prentiss L. Pemberton
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"Unaware," "antiquated," "irrelevant," preaching in a "language without contemporary meaning" — these stern indictments of the Christian Church were made recently not by enemies and defamers of that Church, but by certain of her most loyal and devoted sons. A study report to the Toronto meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches was summarized, in part, as follows:

> Almost unaware of the radical change in the social structure of its environment, it (the Church) has continued to hold on to antiquated social concepts, to preach in a language without contemporary meaning, and to carry on unimaginative and frequently irrelevant parish activities.

These words eloquently, harshly confront churchmen with questions which must be faced. Why is the Church finding its ministry so meaningless and irrelevant to modern man in his predicament?

There is no simple answer to this "why." Today the ecumenical movement, which embraces an encounter of minds quickened by the power of Christ extending far beyond the theological formula of the World Council of Churches, is engaged in a critical, prayerful effort to find answers. Wherever orthodox, neo-orthodox, existentialist, liberal Christians are humbled by the awareness that their profoundest formulations of Christian Truth fail to bespeak the Eternal Word with simple clarity and sharp relevance, there we discover a search for a new consensus under the Holy Spirit. This paper proposes to examine certain of the unique difficulties which confront this ecumenical effort and to submit proposals regarding possible steps toward a resolution of certain of these difficulties.

The Gospel is the glad tidings of a band of pilgrims. These "strangers and exiles on the earth" are "seeking a homeland," are looking forward to a city "which has foundations, whose

builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11) These sojourners find in life a dynamic sense of meaning and direction. They are going somewhere. They discover, however, that many people they encounter during their journey have little or no sense of meaning and direction. Life is for these others a dreary round of monotony or senseless change. Eagerly the pilgrims share their Good News, pointing out rich meanings available in even the most commonplace events of daily living, once one discovers the meaning of the journey.

The Christian's effort to preach his Gospel encounters a very basic problem. His Good News does not readily make sense to the non-pilgrims. When he declares ultimate reality to be as a Father exercising redemptive Judgment and Love, men insist that he is merely projecting his wishes, that this vast cosmos actually subjects men to a maddening mixture of pleasure and pain, of hope and despair signifying nothing. The Christian has to admit, furthermore, that from their perspective men have good reason for reaching this tragic conclusion. Indeed, the Christian concedes that his amazing Gospel is a "secret wisdom," "hidden from the wise and understanding and revealed to . . . babes," sounding to the unbeliever as sheer "foolishness."

This profound problem of communication impels the pilgrim to search for every other possible vehicle for telling his Good News. In this search he finds it possible to translate at least important parts of his Truth into a universal language, the language of the ethical demonstration of the power of his Gospel in concrete daily living. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." The non-pilgrims, he finds, are tremendously interested in this life "here and now." They are involved in the vitalities of sex, concerned about family relations, absorbed in the processes of commerce, law and government, excited about inventing and enjoying new things, quickened by the adumbrations of aesthetic experience. Now he, too, is profoundly interested in all of these earthly functions — more deeply interested than are the others. He believes that all the conditions of life in this world have been predetermined by the Creator Himself. "And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good." This faith enhances every aspect of the earthly pilgrimage. Aulén and Tillich hold that since God creates the universe, the finite is not, in itself, evil. The Second Report of the Advisory Com-

mission of the World Council of Churches affirms that men need not hesitate to scrutinize the inmost secrets of the universe, since "all its foundations were laid by the Creator." (19)

The Christian's concern for every aspect of God's creation impels him to relate his transcendant faith to all earthly experience. Even in the earliest Christian community, where there was a strong expectation of their Lord's imminent return for a cataclysmic Judgment, the disciples "out lived, outthought, and out died" their contemporaries. Their homes and family life, their cooperative business enterprises, their reformed procedure for treatment of slaves, their appreciation for human wisdom, and their diligent civic responsibility (as long as they were not commanded to disobey their Heavenly King) — these are but some of the cumulative evidences of historical research which testify to the sociological effectness of primitive Christianity. The same testimony can be traced through the subsequent centuries. The monasteries of the Dark Ages, the Christendom of medievalism, the social impact of Lutheranism and, especially, Calvinism, the commonwealths built by Puritanism — these are some of the continuing historical fruits of pilgrims who "conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises . . ." It was as though these Christians had a secret formula by which they could focus their primary attention upon their heavenly destination and thereby understand better the essential meaning of the here and now. Their knowledge of the larger universe within which they journeyed seemed to furnish unique understanding of each locality through which they passed.

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It is necessary at this point to return to our initial problems: Why is the Church finding its ministry so meaningless and irrelevant to modern man? And why is the ecumenical movement having such difficulty in answering this question?

The above summary of historical Christianity would seem to suggest a very simple answer. Let the pilgrims again proclaim the Good News of their "hidden" wisdom; let them again demonstrate the power of a secret formula regarding how to live most effectively here and now! Will not these time-tested methods which proved so effective during the first seventeen centuries of Christian history again win the day? This writer believes they will. But it is precisely in connection

with these two very efforts that present-day Christians encounter serious new difficulties which must now be considered.

First, Christians are finding that their "hidden" wisdom encounters in modernity a communication context quite different from that existing in the pre-modern age. In the former time the divine "foolishness" of Christ was but one of many supernatural religions competing for the response of men. For most people the question was: In which of the gods, mystery cults, or miracle-working spirits shall we believe? The superhuman and the supernatural, in some form or other, was a common element in their world view. In such a setting it was difficult, to be sure, to win men to a full understanding and acceptance of the Gospel — just as difficult as it is today. It was not, however, so difficult to win them to partial acceptance in which, unfortunately, a mixture of superstition was blended with faith.

Turning to the modern situation, we discern a radically different mood. Men are increasingly unaffected by all religious meanings which stem from traditional supernatural notions. Many people still use the symbols of other-worldly religion, to be sure. There has even been a recent revival of such forms. Moderns often assume that they believe in the same God as their fathers. But they actually do not believe in a Personal Creator, Judge, Savior, presiding over their destinies, with whom they can have personal communion. Increasingly their real framework of reference is not God, but countless idols erected to earthly interests and principalities. It is sensitivity to this modern mood which has prompted such apologists as Bultmann and Tillich to insist that the Christian pilgrim today faces a radically new "existential" situation in his effort to make the Gospel relevant to all of life.

What is the essence, the fundamental characteristic of this new existential situation? It is not, as already stated, the difficulty of winning men to full discipleship. The "word of the cross is folly" to non-pilgrims in any generation. A basic difference is the fact that **it was much easier, in pre-modern times, to make men respond to, if not accept, Christianity.** This very response usually meant an **indirect** recognition of the institutional church and its morality as normative for the community. Even the unbeliever who cursed God involuntarily feared His wrath. Even men who were not full believers granted that morality rested upon firm supernatural founda-

tions. Divine sanctions for morality, including expectations of life after death, were common ingredients in almost all human motivation. If many refused to accept fully the Christian God, few were totally indifferent to Him. The Christian pilgrim could count, therefore, upon this implicit **Weltanschauung** for **indirect** assistance in making his Gospel influential in the daily lives of all men. The parson was the **first person** in the community. His "hidden" and "foolish" Gospel had a very **practical carry-over in family, economical, and political** experience. Thus, when traditional Christians resorted to the universal language of ethical demonstration to witness to the Truth of their "secret wisdom," most non-Christians granted that this translation was probably an authentic version of an **original language.**

If the above analysis stands, we have been led to the heart of the problem confronting present-day Christians. Increasing numbers of moderns have fashioned for themselves an implicit world view in which they assume no connection, direct **or indirect,** between the Christian's "hidden" Gospel and his ethical demonstration. Increasingly they are indifferent to the entire assumption that there needs to be a Divine Vine as the direct **or indirect** source of fruit-bearing branches. No longer **is the language** of ethical demonstration regarded as a translation of an original language of basic religion experience. This modern mood assumes that ethical living is itself the basic language. This mood has no objection to Christians living under their **illusion** that a Father-God is the source of moral power. Indeed, many secularists favor strengthening this illusion for weaker spirits. Christianity is credited with certain values but can no longer be seriously regarded as "the way, the truth, and **the life.**"

There is a second serious difficulty arising out of the modern situation confronting the Christian. Whenever he attempts any translation of his Gospel into the universal language of ethical demonstration, moderns, with consciences sharpened by the lessons of historical experience, hasten to point out the ridiculous contradictions in various Christian translations. These critics insist that either the original text is corrupt or most of the translations are inaccurate. Certainly we Christians seeking a responsible social position must confess that a confused jumble of ethical translations can be cited: Christians affirming that their "hidden" Gospel requires them to handle poison snakes, to prove negroes an inferior species

of humanity, to spread anti-Semitism, to support fanatical nationalism, to absolutize a particular political or economic group, to strengthen existent forms of injustice, and to undermine all prerequisites for artistic creativity. These are but some of the strange fruits of sincere Christian piety in the world today.

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Why is the Church finding its ministry so meaningless and irrelevant to modern man? Three reasons have been offered: (1) It is difficult for man to comprehend the full simplicity and mystery of the Gospel. Its almost too-good-to-be-true Glad Tidings regarding Ultimate Being as Lord and Father sounds to the unbeliever as "foolishness." This problem of communication is encountered by the pilgrims of any age. (2) When the Christian attempts to translate some of the mystery of this Redemptive Love into a more universal language of ethical fruits, he finds it difficult to convince moderns that unique faith-experience is the actual source of his ethics. They no longer have a world view assuming that there is an intrinsic connection between supernatural religion and earthly values. (3) As soon as attention is focused upon ethical fruits, the non-Christian points to the embarrassing fact that there are no established Christian criteria by which to evaluate Christian social responsibility. God's will is claimed as the source of a strange jumble of positive and vicious actions of man to man. The combination of these three difficulties jams every communication between Christians and non-Christians. No longer is the pilgrim implicitly credited with a secret formula giving him greater insight into the here and now. When his faith moves him to proclaim his "hidden" Gospel, he is usually tolerated as a harmless sojourner, talking of utopian ideals never meant for this modern world.

The foregoing analysis has driven us to a profoundly disturbing conclusion. **Christianity is no longer serving as an authentic cultural religion.** It is still very influential in culture but no longer able to mold culture. Christianity, to use the helpful terms of Richard Niebuhr, is largely accommodated to culture or in paradox with culture. Recent decades have done little to answer the challenge with which Troeltsch closed his massive study of eighteen centuries of Christian social effort:

> "If the present social situation is to be controlled by Christian principles, thoughts will be necessary which

have not yet been thought, and which will correspond to this new situation as the older forms met the need of the social situation in earlier ages. These ideas will have to be evolved out of the inner impulses of Christian thought, and out of its vital expression at the present time, and not exclusively out of the New Testament, in precisely the same way as both those great main types of Christian-Social philosophy (Thomist "other-worldly" and Calvinist "this-worldly" asceticism) were evolved out of the Christian thought of their own day, and not solely from the New Testament."*

Since modern Christianity has thus far failed to generate a new, relevant **Kulturethik**, we churchmen must at least confront ourselves with the disturbing question: Can our "hidden" Gospel become the accepted guide for a modern civilization where men hold few if any of the basic assumptions which, in past ages, provided indirect sanctions for the ethical claims of that Gospel?

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This paper, it may be recalled, proposes: (1) To examine unique difficulties confronting the ecumenical effort to make the Gospel relevant and meaningful to modern man, and (2) to submit certain reflections regarding possible steps toward a resolution of at least some of these difficulties. The first task is completed, as far as the limitations of this paper permit. It is the easier task requiring only careful discernment into our actual predicament. The second task is far more demanding. The humble, patient effort of many churchmen, prayerfully seeking a new consensus under the Holy Spirit, offers the only method which may suffice. The following thoughts set forth this writer's understanding of some of the aspects of this consensus effort.

Christianity is intrinsically a cultural religion. The Judaism with which it is indissolubly joined, the attention our Lord focused upon the earthly needs and interests of man, the refusal of the earliest disciples to withdraw into a totally isolated community even when facing the hostility of pagan Rome, the theology of Incarnation — these are but some of

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* Ernst Troeltsch, **The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches**, trans. by Olive Wyon (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London, 1949), II, 1012-13.

the factors which attest to a basic "culturability." The power of the Faith to create and dominate Western civilization for 1500 years confirms this judgment. The failure of Christianity to develop during the last 200 years a social philosophy capable of moulding modern society is due to a failure of churchmen, not to an inherent weakness of the Gospel. Only within relatively the present moment have we churchmen been driven to confess our failure. Repentantly we are seeking God's Will to guide us in building a **new Christian society.** The term Christian society is used in T. S. Elliot's context, wherein it is differentiated from a "community of Christians" and safeguarded from liberal utopianism. (See his **The Idea of a Christian Society**).

The point from which churchmen can well initiate their undertaking is the increasing disintegration of Western civilization. Even non-Christians are becoming conscious of desparate need. An age which, in its earlier sophistication, assumed we could have a civilization in which "each man did what was right in his own eyes," has been terribly shaken by the emergence of **isms** which assume it is right to utilize the full science of modern power to absolutize their one right. Possibilities are opening for new experiments in communication between preachers of their "hidden" Gospel and secular man.

But unique new difficulties confronting the Christian — difficulties analyzed in the preceding section of this paper — must not lull the evangelist into a false confidence that urgency of need itself will drive moderns to accept the Faith. Modern man has implicit difficulties in making even a serious response to "the folly of the Cross." More than ever he needs to be helped with an authentic translation of ethical demonstration. Christians must revise their contradictory ethical translations into a more standard version, if they are to have a truly relevant and meaningful Word.

Why, we inquire next, have these ethical translations become increasingly confused and contradictory in modern times? There are many reasons. For one thing, mankind's developing ethical consciousness throws an ever clearer light upon all discrepancies between ideal and practice. The reason to be stressed here, however, is the Christian's **failure to comprehend the new, dynamic nature of modern social institutions.** This point is one which cannot be developed in this paper, but at least must be made clear. It means simply this: Before modernity men assumed that their social institutions,

i. e. the total manner in which they conceived and carried out their marriage bonds, their family relations, their economic and political relations, et cetera, were **static structures.** It was assumed that their ancestors had maintained the same way of life from "time immemorial," and that the "laws of custom" would preserve that way of life into an indefinite future. A changing procession of actors went on and off the stage, but the stage setting remained the same. This was the **accumption,** it must be stressed. Actually there was change, usually gradual, sometimes sudden, in the institutional structures of the ancient world. But such pre-modern change was accidental and fortuitous. Except when compelled by external forces such as droughts, such change was bitterly opposed by all of the inclinations and beliefs of the peoole. **Only modern society has institutionalized processes for deliberate planning to change institutions.** Encouragement to design new styles in women's clothing, formulation of a rigorous process for inventing scientific invention, procedure for democratic and peaceful change of governing power, and the encouragement of each person to seek out his own vocational activity — these are but four of the countless social institutions of modernity which continuously produce new dynamic patterns in daily living. Such institutions mean, as Whitehead pointed out, that not only does environment change man; man also changes environment.

Let us consider briefly some of the consequences of the modern stress upon each person seeking his own vocation according to his private interests and desires. Pre-modern society ascribed to the overwhelming majority of people a fixed vocation. The son of a serf was to remain a serf, the son of a carpenter was to remain a carpenter. Only when it was assumed, largely under the impact of Calvinism, that everyone should have the opportunity to learn to read and write were the forces instituted which led to modern vocation choosing. And once personal freedom to decide one's work was established, an entirely new "law" of social process was instituted. One phase of that "law" can be stated as follows: Any society which encourages every individual to develop himself vocationally in any field of thought and activity he chooses will continuously transform itself into a more complex technological system. In these complex systems new dimenions of human experience emerge, new aspects of selfhood develop, and new moral and spiritual problems are generated. For example, the moral criteria which a Christian

should use in personally recommending certain items to his neighbors are fairly clear; the moral criteria which a Christian advertising executive should adopt for his corporation in selling certain items to the public are not nearly so clear. But until churchmen can develop, by consensus building, moral principles which have concrete relevance to these new dimensions of experience, the Church will produce no effective **Kulturethik.**

The task calls for work on basic Christian principles in the field of modern social institutions. These Christian "natural" laws will be bi-polar. At one extreme they will have a transcendent reference to the eternal Will of Him who has fixed the conditions within which alone man can find life and community. At the other extreme they will have an historical reference to the processes of contemporary social institutions. This means there is always a Christian "absolute" which is highly relative to each concrete social situation. Already we have learned this truth in personal Christian ethics. We say, love God and do as you please. This is a sound axiom only when we are convinced that the person will interpret such love as requiring him to make an intelligent effort to understand his neighbor's real needs in every concrete situation. Even so, we are clearly at the point in complex institutional relations where love of God must impel every Christian to the greatest possible effort to understand new institutional needs in every concrete situation.

Christians have been proclaiming a message irrelevant to the changing pressures of modern social institutions because they do not adequately understand the "operational laws" of such institutions. At the risk of seeming to push his own discipline, this writer is convinced that fuller understanding can be gained only by means of rigorous work in the social sciences, particularly psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The "tools" derivable from these sciences are as essential to an adequate theology for Christian social responsibility in our day, as were the Platonic tools necessary for an adequate evangelism in the Nicaean age. Only such rigorous work will enable churchmen to avoid either accommodation to or irresponsible attacks upon the dynamic social institutions of our society.

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The parish minister is already carrying a tremendous burden in this age of cultural disintegration. If it were not for his steadying ministry, many more people would be "cracking up" under the strains of modern living. The foregoing analysis means in no wise to ignore the significant achievements of those now carrying the brunt of church leadership. The point of this paper is that their task is becoming overwhelming because institutional pressures are producing human maladjustments at an ever accelerating tempo. Christian theologians, ministers, and social scientists must unite their creative efforts, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern new institutional patterns which might at least check this accelerating tempo. This calls for pioneering work in **preventive,** not merely **remedial,** social action.

The Library has prepared a mimeographed, classified list of books added to the Library during the autumn. A copy will be sent to anyone requesting one and on receipt of six cents in stamps to cover postage. The supply is limited.